

**MARVEL
COMICS**



**MAR
#6**

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

THE NEXT GENERATION
OF **AVENGERS!**

NEXT

INTRODUCING
THE SON OF
HERCULES!



AND NOW COMES...

ARGO

THE ALMIGHTY!

DEFALCO

FRENZ

MILGROM



HE STRIDES AMID THE CRUSH OF HUMANITY, SURROUNDED ON EVERY SIDE BY THE BORED, THE ANXIOUS AND THE GAWKING--

--BUT HE IGNORES THEM ALL!



HE IS A YOUNG MAN WITH A MISSION--

--A GRIM AND TERRIBLE RESPONSIBILITY THAT HAUNTS HIS DREAMS AND DOMINATES HIS EVERY WAKING MOMENT.



AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN MARCHING TOWARD A FATEFUL--AND, PERHAPS, FATAL--CONFRONTATION WITH THE NEXT GENERATION OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES...

A NEXT

AND
NOW

ARGO

THE
ALMIGHTY!

STAN LEE PRESENTS... TOM DEFALCO & RON FRENZ--WORDS/PLOT/PENCILS
AL MILGROM--FINISHED ART JIM NOVAK--CALLIGRAPHY
BOB SHAREN--COLOR ARTIST BOB HARRAS--OLYMPIAN IN CHIEF

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, A FEW BLOCKS AWAY, IN THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CURRENT TEAM OF AVENGERS...

SHE IS XENETTE, DAUGHTER OF A WARRIOR PRINCESS FORGED IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE AND--

WELL! WELL! BEHOLD THE KING ON HIS MIGHTY THRONE!

T-THUNDERSTRIKE, I... UHHH... WAS... WELLLL...

WE DON'T OWN A LARGE SCREEN HDTV AT MY HOUSE.

RELAX, JUGGIE! WE'VE ALL STARTED TO TREAT THIS PLACE LIKE HOME.

I JUST DROPPED BY TO DO A QUICK LAUNDRY.

AND THE NEXT STOP ON OUR TOUR IS THE RECREATION CENTER WHERE-- OH! WE'RE IN LUCK, EVERYONE!

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO MEET THUNDERSTRIKE AND J2.

A-AMERICAN DREAM-- ?!

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING AN AVENGER?

SMILE--!

CAN YOU TAKE ONE OF ME AND THE THUNDER GUY?

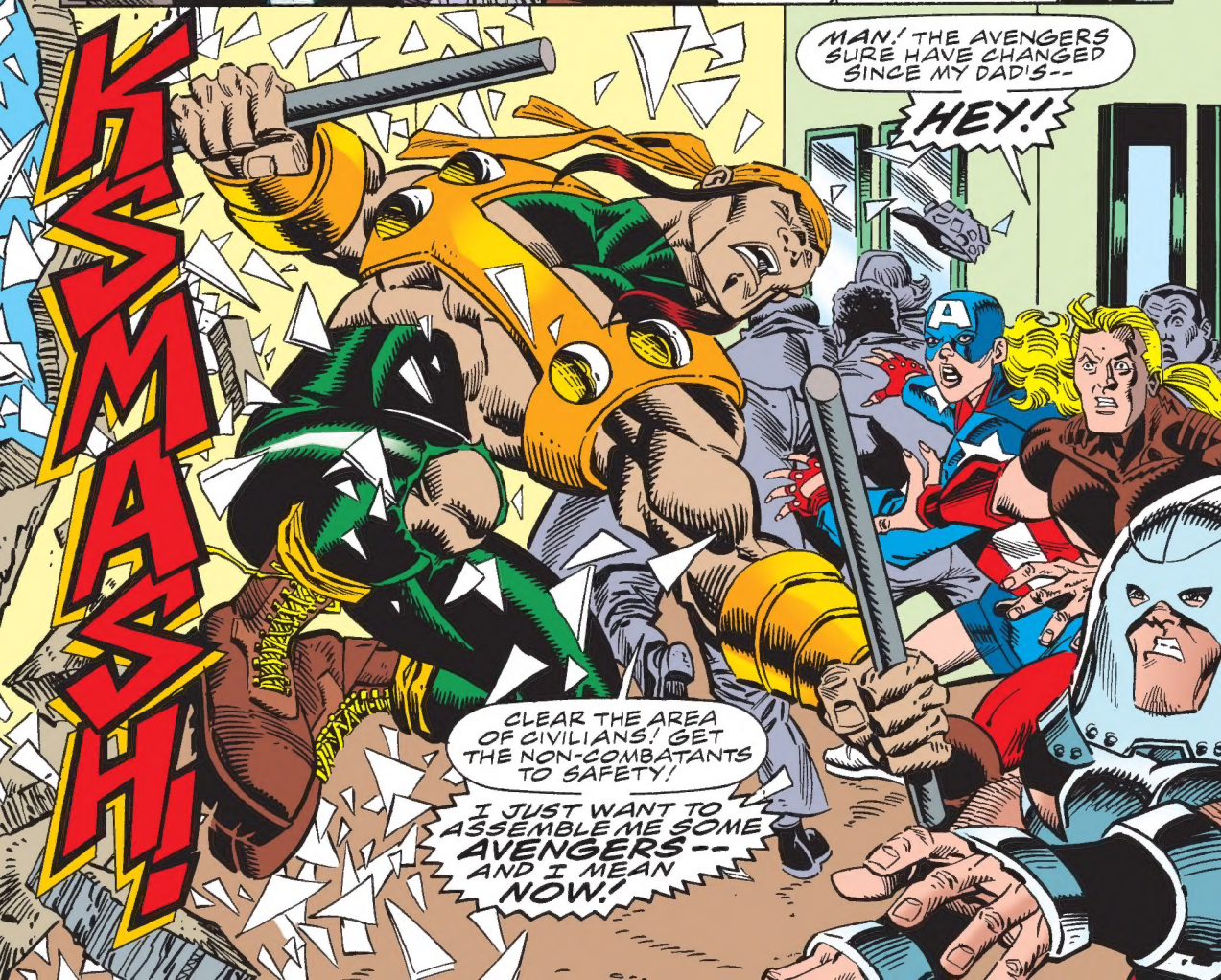
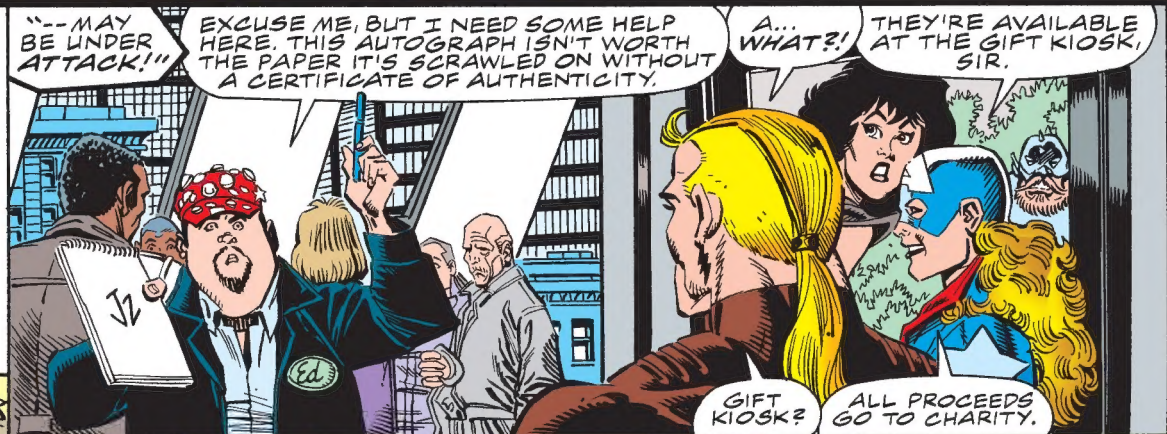
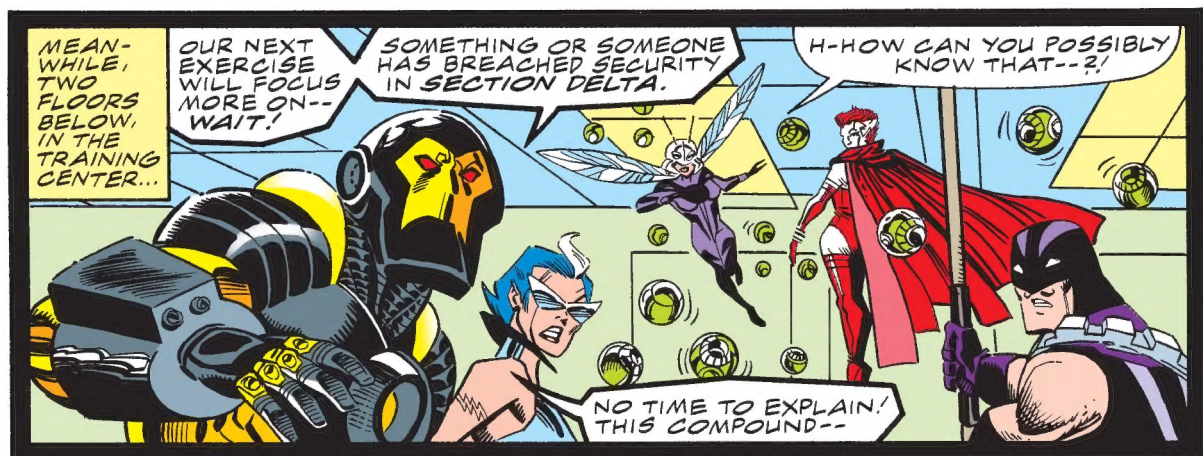
HOW MANY AUTOGRAPHS CAN I GET?

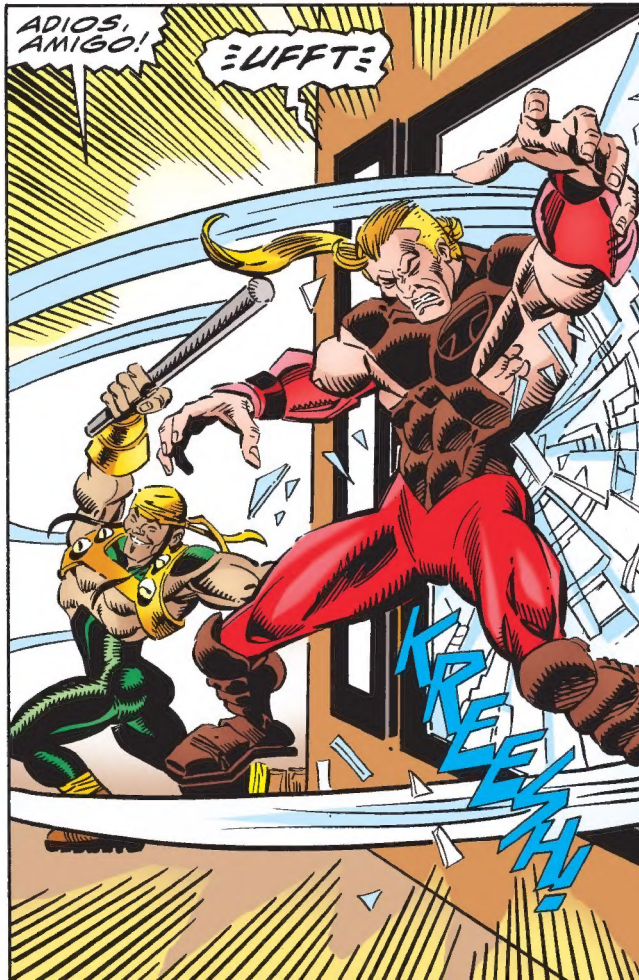
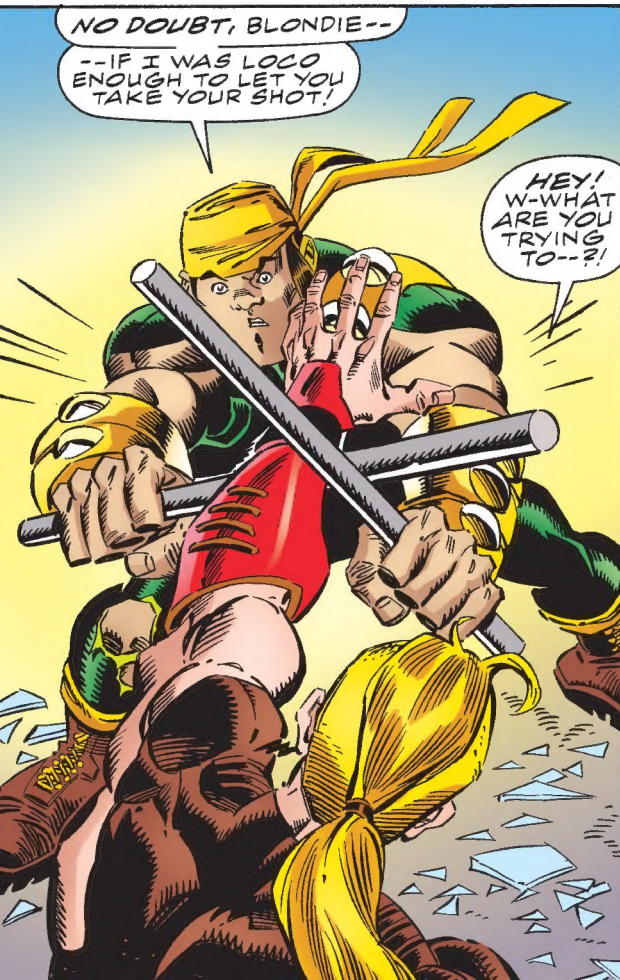
ARE YOU STILL A TOUR GUIDE HERE? I ASSUMED YOU QUIT WHEN YOU JOINED THE TEAM.

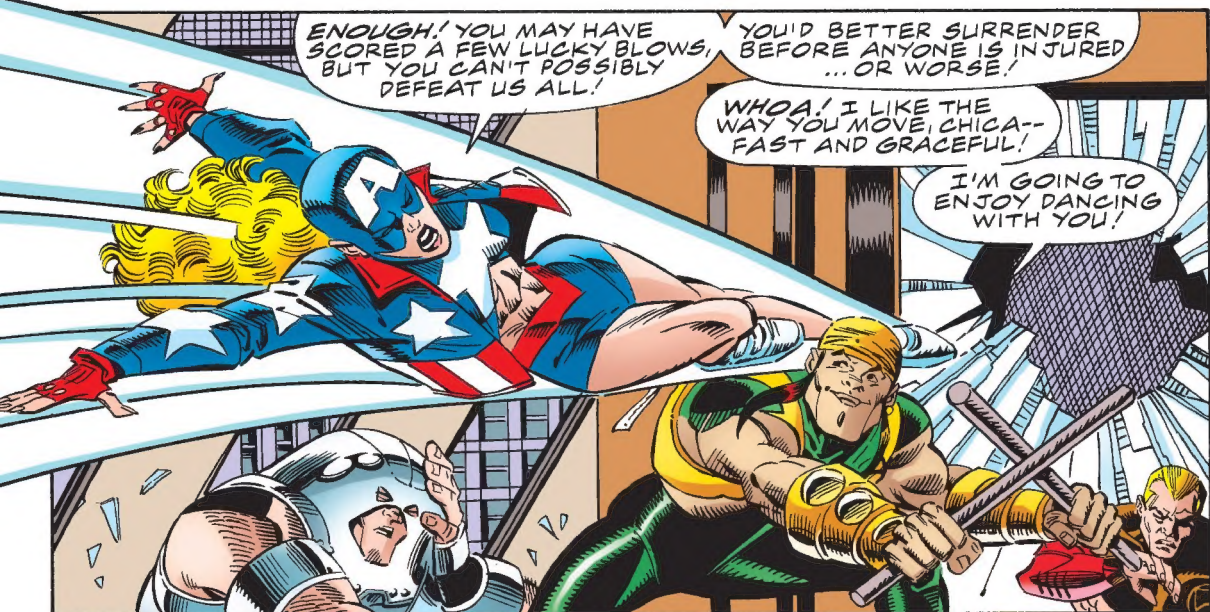
WISH I COULD, BUT IT'S MY ONLY SOURCE OF INCOME.

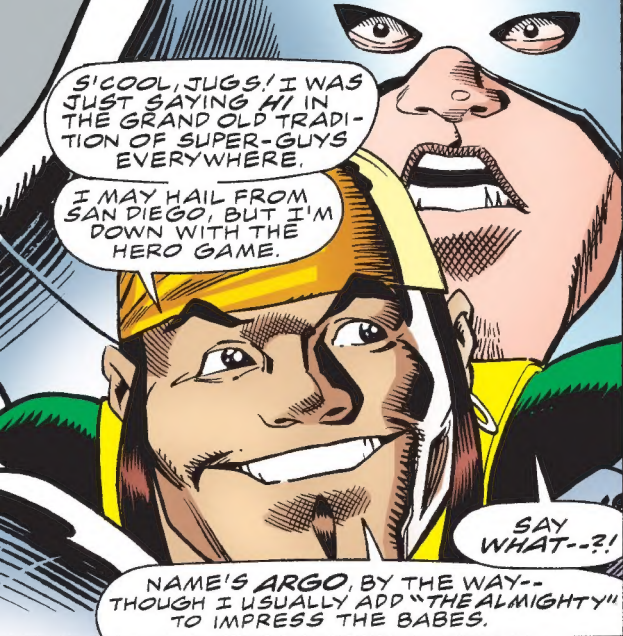
HOW DO YOU SUPPORT YOURSELF WHEN OUT OF COSTUME?

I... EHHH... WORK AS A DISHWASHER.







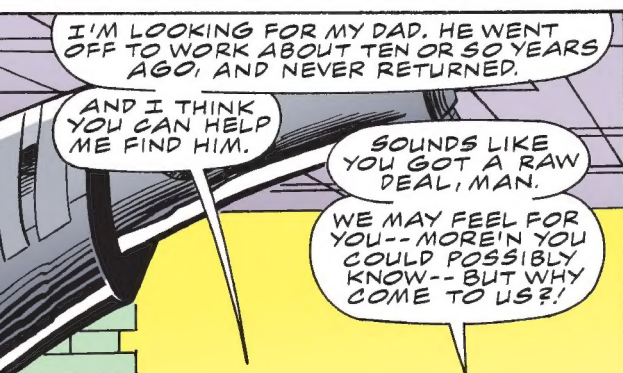


S'COOL, JUGS! I WAS JUST SAYING HI IN THE GRAND OLD TRADITION OF SUPER-GUYS EVERYWHERE.

I MAY HAIL FROM SAN DIEGO, BUT I'M DOWN WITH THE HERO GAME.

SAY WHAT--?!

NAME'S ARGO, BY THE WAY-- THOUGH I USUALLY ADD "THE ALMIGHTY" TO IMPRESS THE BABES.

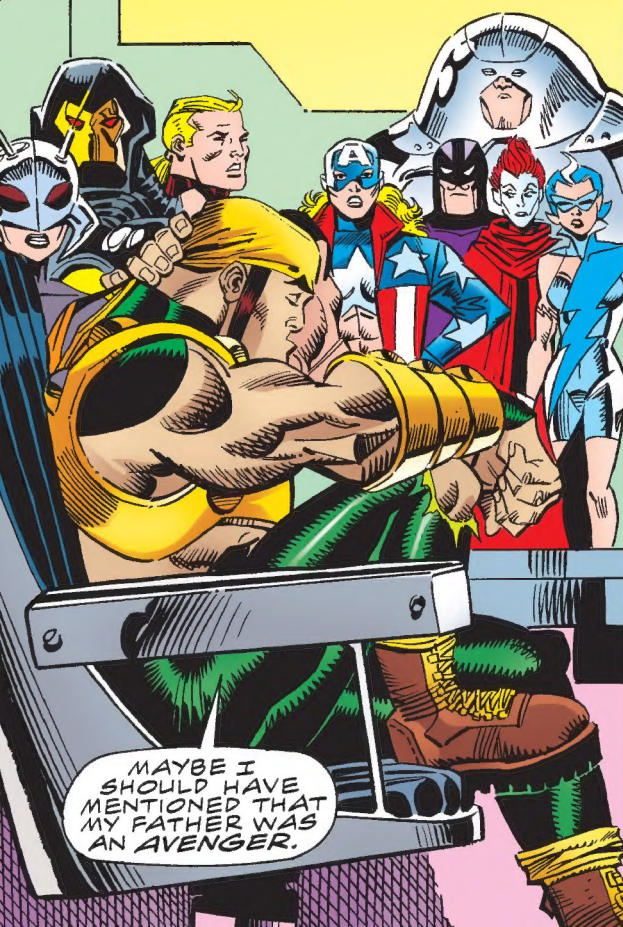


I'M LOOKING FOR MY DAD. HE WENT OFF TO WORK ABOUT TEN OR SO YEARS AGO, AND NEVER RETURNED.

AND I THINK YOU CAN HELP ME FIND HIM.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU GOT A RAW DEAL, MAN.

WE MAY FEEL FOR YOU-- MORE'N YOU COULD POSSIBLY KNOW-- BUT WHY COME TO US?!



MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE MENTIONED THAT MY FATHER WAS AN AVENGER.

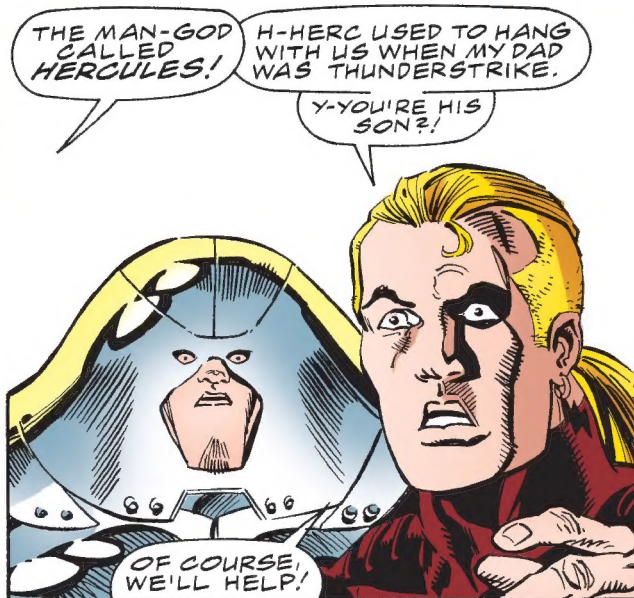


Y-YOU STARTED A FIGHT JUST TO GET OUR ATTENTION?!

DUDE, YOU ARE A DOZEN DIFFERENT KINDS OF CRAZY!

WHY DO I SUSPECT THERE'S MORE TO YOUR STORY?

'CAUSE YOU'RE NO DOPE, METAL MAN!

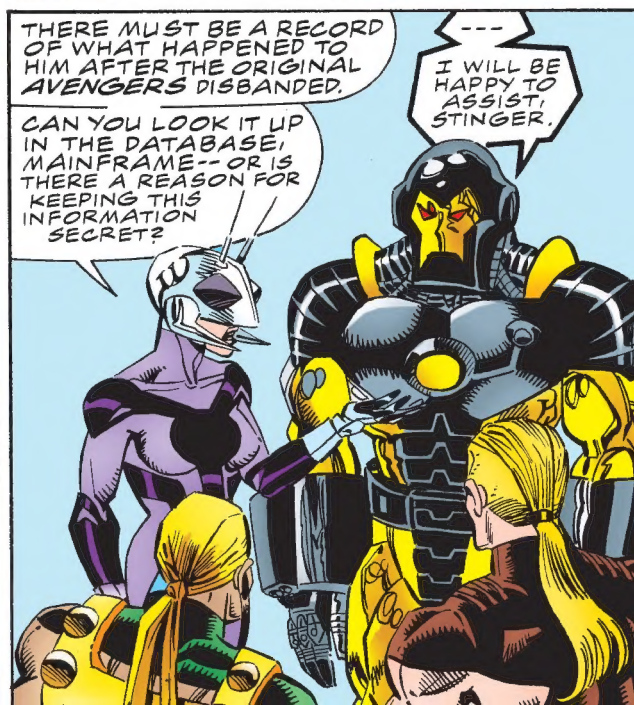


THE MAN-GOD CALLED HERCULES!

H-HERC USED TO HANG WITH US WHEN MY DAD WAS THUNDERSTRIKE.

Y-YOU'RE HIS SON?!

OF COURSE, WE'LL HELP!



THERE MUST BE A RECORD OF WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM AFTER THE ORIGINAL AVENGERS DISBANDED.

CAN YOU LOOK IT UP IN THE DATABASE, MAINFRAME-- OR IS THERE A REASON FOR KEEPING THIS INFORMATION SECRET?

--- I WILL BE HAPPY TO ASSIST, STINGER.

LOOK AT HIM GO, BLUESTREAK! MAINFRAME PLAYS THAT COMPUTER KEYBOARD ALMOST AS FAST AS YOU RUN.

SPOOKY, AIN'T IT?

ODD! EVERY QUERY ABOUT HERCULES STARTS A SUB-PROGRAM THAT IMMEDIATELY LINKS US TO THE SHIELD FACILITY WHICH IS LOCATED AT MOUNT ATHENA IN UPSTATE NEW YORK.

IS THAT SOME KIND OF MAXIMUM-SECURITY PRISON?

THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONNECTION BETWEEN OUR QUARRY, AND SOMETHING CODE-NAMED "THE MERCHANDISE".

UGNNNS S-SHE...IS NOT PLEASED.

SHE, CRIMSON CURSE? SHE... WHO?!

I...I DO NOT KNOW... BUT I CAN SENSE HER PRESENCE...

AND SHE DOES NOT WANT US TO DELVE INTO THE REASONS BEHIND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HERCULES.

I CALLED SHIELD AND, WITH A LITTLE PRODDING, ARRANGED FOR US TO VIEW "THE MERCHANDISE".

FINE, BUT YOU DON'T NEED ALL OF US, FREE-BOOTER, CURSE, AND I WILL STAY BEHIND TO FOLLOW ANOTHER HUNCH.

LIKE WHAT?

FEELING PARANOID, MAINFRAME?

OF COURSE...NOT!

YOU'RE NOT COMING?

BUMMER!

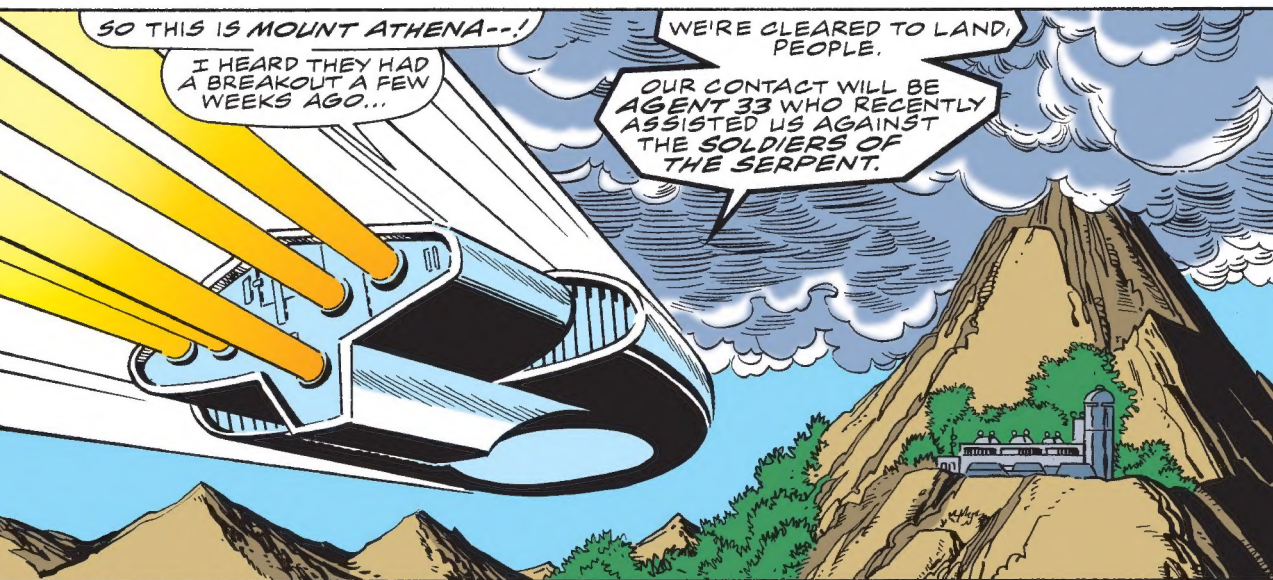
DO ME A FAVOR, JUGGIE-- KEEP AN EYE ON OUR TIN-PLATED FRIEND.

HE'S REALLY BEEN GIVING ME THE WIGGENS LATELY.

HERC WAS PRETTY TIGHT WITH MY FATHER, ARGO.

HE EVEN USED TO VISIT ME IN LOS ANGELES AFTER POP DIED.

REALLY? THAT'S WHERE HE MET MOM.



SO THIS IS MOUNT ATHENA--!

I HEARD THEY HAD
A BREAKOUT A FEW
WEEKS AGO...

WE'RE CLEARED TO LAND,
PEOPLE.

OUR CONTACT WILL BE
AGENT 33 WHO RECENTLY
ASSISTED US AGAINST
THE SOLDIERS OF
THE SERPENT.

"THE MERCHANDISE" IS IN A SPECIAL
CELL, BURIED SEVERAL MILES WITHIN
THE MOUNTAIN.

THIS CELL IS
CONSTRUCTED OF
CONSTANTLY MOVING
LAYERS OF
UNBREAKABLE
ADAMANTIUM--

--AND CAN
ONLY BE ENTERED
VIA CERTAIN
JUNCTION POINTS
THAT ARE BETWEEN
EACH LAYER.

WHATEVER'S
IN THERE
MUST BE AS
DANGEROUS
AS IT IS
POWERFUL.

I'M AFRAID THE IDENTITY OF "THE
MERCHANDISE" HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON
A STRICT NEED-TO-KNOW BASIS--

--AND NO ONE PRESENTLY
ASSIGNED TO THIS INSTALLATION
POSSESSES THAT INTEL.

HOWEVER--
AND MY ORDERS
COME FROM THE
TOP MAN HIMSELF--
YOU MAY TAKE
CUSTODY OF "THE
MERCHANDISE" IF
YOU WISH.

FOLLOW ME TO THE FIRST
JUNCTION POINT.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS
ACTUALLY WILL LEAD TO
HERCULES, BUT IT'S
WORTH A SHOT.

YEAH...

T-THERE IS
SO MUCH I
NEED TO... SAY
...TO MY DAD.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT AVENGERS COMPOUND...

ALL CLEAR, STINGER!

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT, FREEBOOTER? NOBODY'S BEEN IN THIS SUB-BASEMENT IN YEARS.

HECK, ALL THE TIME I SERVED WITH THE ORIGINAL AVENGERS, I DON'T THINK ANYONE WAS EVER DOWN HERE.

WE GET YOUR POINT, DAD.

THEN, WHY ARE WE HERE?

SUB LEVEL 7

BECAUSE I HAVE SENSED AN UNKNOWN PRESENCE EVER SINCE I FIRST ENTERED THESE GROUNDS, MR. LANG--

--AND HERE IS WHERE MY TRACKING SPELL LEADS US.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, AT MOUNT ATHENA...

IS IT JUST ME--

--OR DOES ANYONE ELSE QUESTION THE WISDOM OF DROPPING IN ON SOME UNKNOWN SUPER-THINGEE THAT'S BEEN LOCKED AWAY FOR WHO KNOWS HOW LONG?!

YOU COULD HAVE STAYED ON THE SURFACE, BLUEBREAK.

AND PASS UP A CHANCE TO BOND WITH YOU TWO STUD-MUFFINS-- NO WAY!

Y-YOU TALKING ABOUT ME, CHICA?!

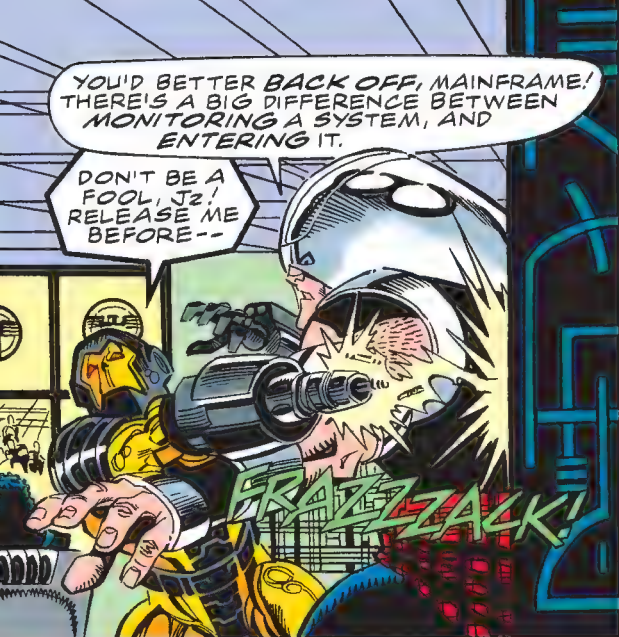
GOTTA BE YOU AND THUNDERSTRIKE, ARGO... 'CAUSE AMERICAN DREAM JUST AIN'T MY TYPE.

ALL SYSTEMS 5 BY 5! THE DROP POD IS NOW APPROACHING THE FINAL JUNCTION.

JUST TO BE SAFE, MAINFRAME, I'D LIKE YOU TO MONITOR THE MANUAL SHUTDOWN FOR THE SECURITY BAFFLES.

I CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT, AGENT 33. I WILL LINK DIRECTLY INTO YOUR SYSTEM.

HEY! THAT'S NOT WHAT SHE TOLD YOU TO DO.



YOU'D BETTER BACK OFF, MAINFRAME! THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MONITORING A SYSTEM, AND ENTERING IT.

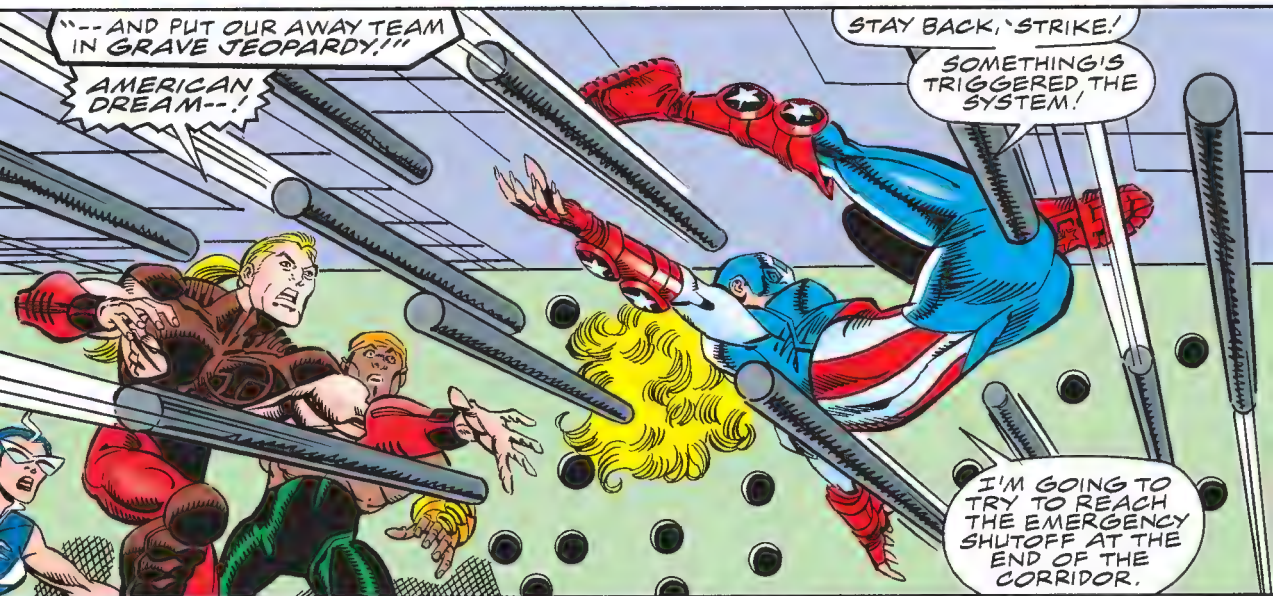
DON'T BE A FOOL, J2! RELEASE ME BEFORE--

FRAZZZACK!



WHAT THE DEVIL--?

NICE WORK, J2! YOU ACCIDENTALLY CRASHED THE SECURITY OVERRIDE--



"-- AND PUT OUR AWAY TEAM IN GRAVE JEOPARDY!"

AMERICAN DREAM--!

STAY BACK, 'STRIKE!

SOMETHING'S TRIGGERED THE SYSTEM!

I'M GOING TO TRY TO REACH THE EMERGENCY SHUTOFF AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR.



WHAT GOOD WILL THAT DO? YOU DON'T KNOW THE CODE TO DISENGAGE THE--ARGO, LOOK OUT!

THWAM!



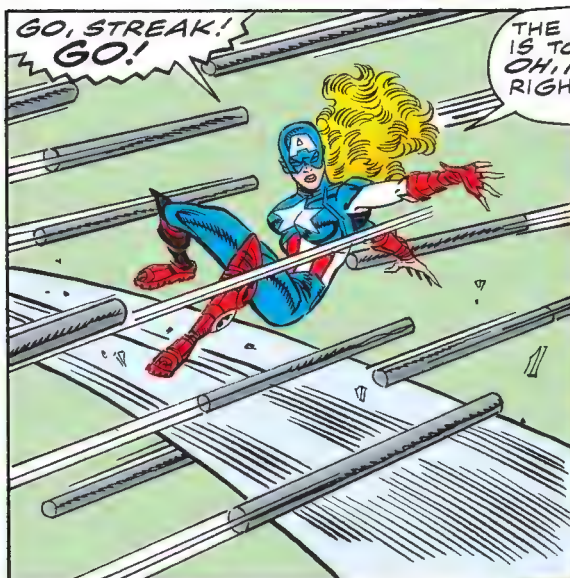
TAKE A PILL, 'STRIKE!

BLUE-STREAK'S ON THE CASE!

NOT ONLY CAN I DODGE THESE CLUMSY PILE DRIVERS IN MY SLEEP--

--I'M A WHIZ WHEN IT COMES TO KEYPADS!

BTTAM!

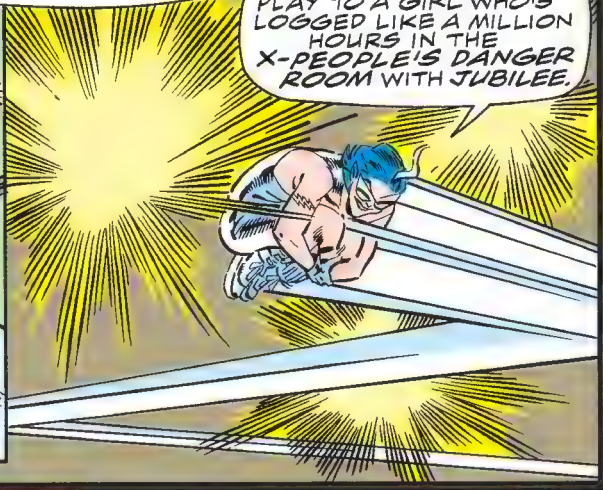


GO, STREAK!
GO!

THE SHUTOFF SWITCH
IS TO YOUR LEFT, AND--
OH, NO! YOU RAN
RIGHT INTO ANOTHER
OBSTACLE!

SAVE YOUR BREATH,
LIBERTY LADY!

THESE BLASTING
PROBES ARE CHILD'S
PLAY TO A GIRL WHO'S
LOGGED LIKE A MILLION
HOURS IN THE
X-PEOPLE'S DANGER
ROOM WITH JUBILEE.



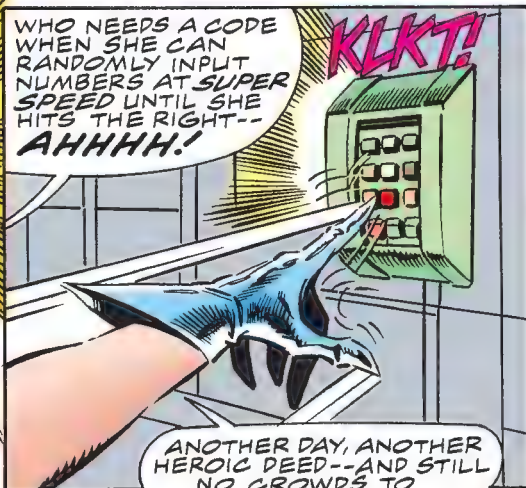
OKAY, BLUE, YOU GET MAJOR PROPS
WHEN IT COMES TO PLAYING
DODGE BALL--

--BUT THAT SHUTOFF
SWITCH STILL REQUIRES
AN ACCESS CODE WHICH,
I HASTEN TO POINT OUT,
YOU DON'T HAVE!



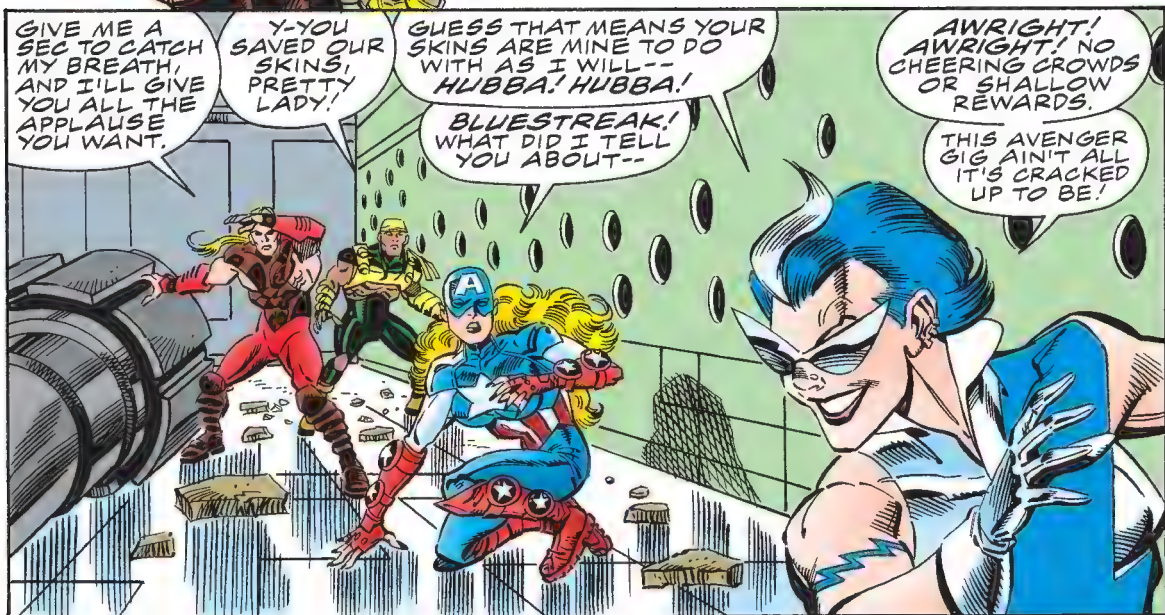
THESE GUYS
ARE ALL
AROUND MY
AGE, BUT
THEY ARE LIKE
--WOW!

WHO NEEDS A CODE
WHEN SHE CAN
RANDOMLY INPUT
NUMBERS AT SUPER
SPEED UNTIL SHE
HITS THE RIGHT--
AHHHH!



ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER
HEROIC DEED--AND STILL
NO CROWDS TO
CHEER ME!

NO WONDER I DYE
MY HAIR BLUE!



GIVE ME A
SEC TO CATCH
MY BREATH,
AND I'LL GIVE
YOU ALL THE
APPLAUSE
YOU WANT.

Y-YOU
SAVED OUR
SKINS,
PRETTY
LADY!

GUESS THAT MEANS YOUR
SKINS ARE MINE TO DO
WITH AS I WILL--
HUBBA! HUBBA!

BLUESTREAK!
WHAT DID I TELL
YOU ABOUT--

AWRIGHT!
AWRIGHT! NO
CHEERING CROWDS
OR SHALLOW
REWARDS.

THIS AVENGER
GIG AIN'T ALL
IT'S CRACKED
UP TO BE!

MEANWHILE...

EXACTLY HOW MANY SUB-LEVELS ARE THERE IN AVENGERS MANSION?

I DOUBT EVEN JARVIS KNOWS, AND HE CAME WITH THE PLACE.

HUSH! SHE IS NEAR, AND-- ODD! SHE RESENTS OUR INTRUSION AND, YET, I SENSE THAT SHE ALSO WELCOMES US.

SHE HAS BEEN ALONE FOR MANY YEARS, AND HUNGERS FOR COMPANIONSHIP.

WHO IS SHE?

I FEAR MY USE OF THE FEMININE PRONOUN MISLEADS YOU, STINGER. I MERELY PREFER ITS USE TO "HE" OR "IT" BECAUSE--

NO!

N-UNNH!

W-WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED TO HER?

I-IS SHE ALL RIGHT?

AERIKA? AERIKA!

SHE SEEMS TO BE BREATHING NORMALLY, BUT I THINK WE'D BETTER GET HER BACK TOPSIDE --AND FAST!

I AGREE!

WHY DON'T YOU TAKE HER BACK WHILE MY DAD AND I--

MY GOD!

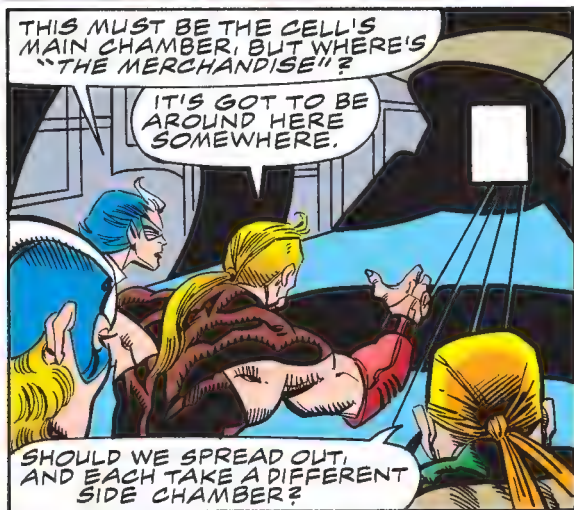
D-DO YOU FEEL IT, TOO?

G-GOOD LORD!

NO!

NO!

NO!





WHY DO YOU
CONTINUE TO
TORTURE ME?

HAS NOT THE ONCE
AND FORMER PRINCE
OF POWER
SUFFERED ENOUGH?

GO! DEPART!
LEAVE ME TO
MY ENDLESS
MISERY!

ALLOW ME THE
SANCTITY OF MY
SOLITUDE,
AND THE COMFORT
OF MY
MADNESS!

T-THE
MERCHANDISE
IS...

HERCULES!



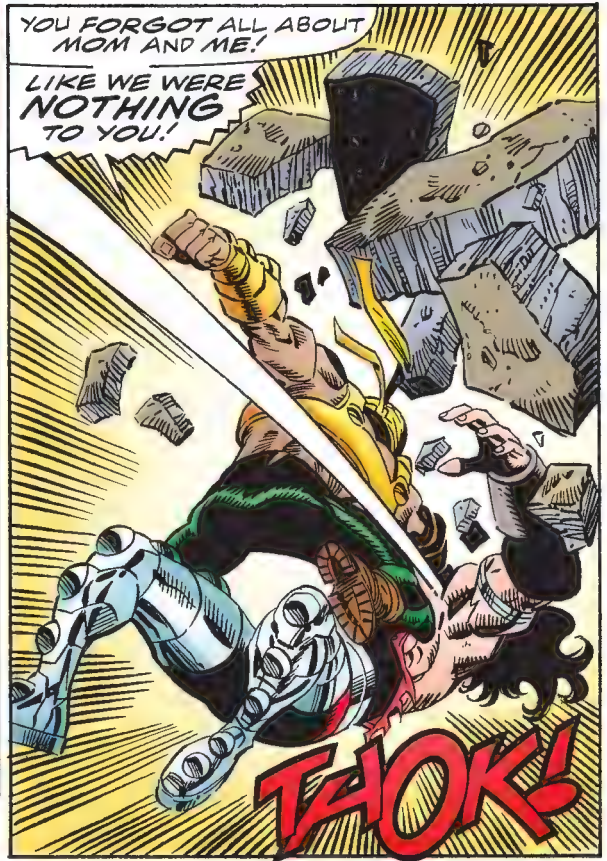
YOU LEFT YOUR FAMILY TO GO OFF ON
YOUR GRAND CRUSADE! YOU FOUGHT
YOUR GLORIOUS BATTLE AND
SURVIVED!

BUT YOU NEVER
RETURNED!



YOU FORGOT ALL ABOUT
MOM AND ME!

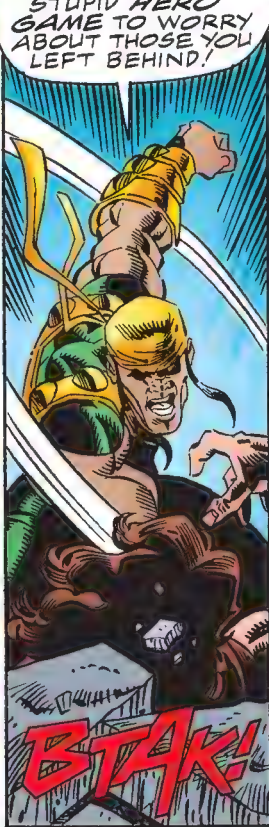
LIKE WE WERE
NOTHING
TO YOU!



MOM DIED OF A
BROKEN HEART,
BUT YOU
COULDN'T CARE
LESS!

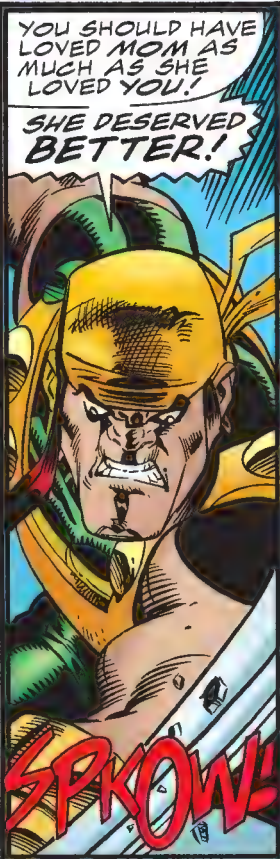


YOU'RE TOO
CAUGHT UP IN YOUR
STUPID HERO
GAME TO WORRY
ABOUT THOSE YOU
LEFT BEHIND!



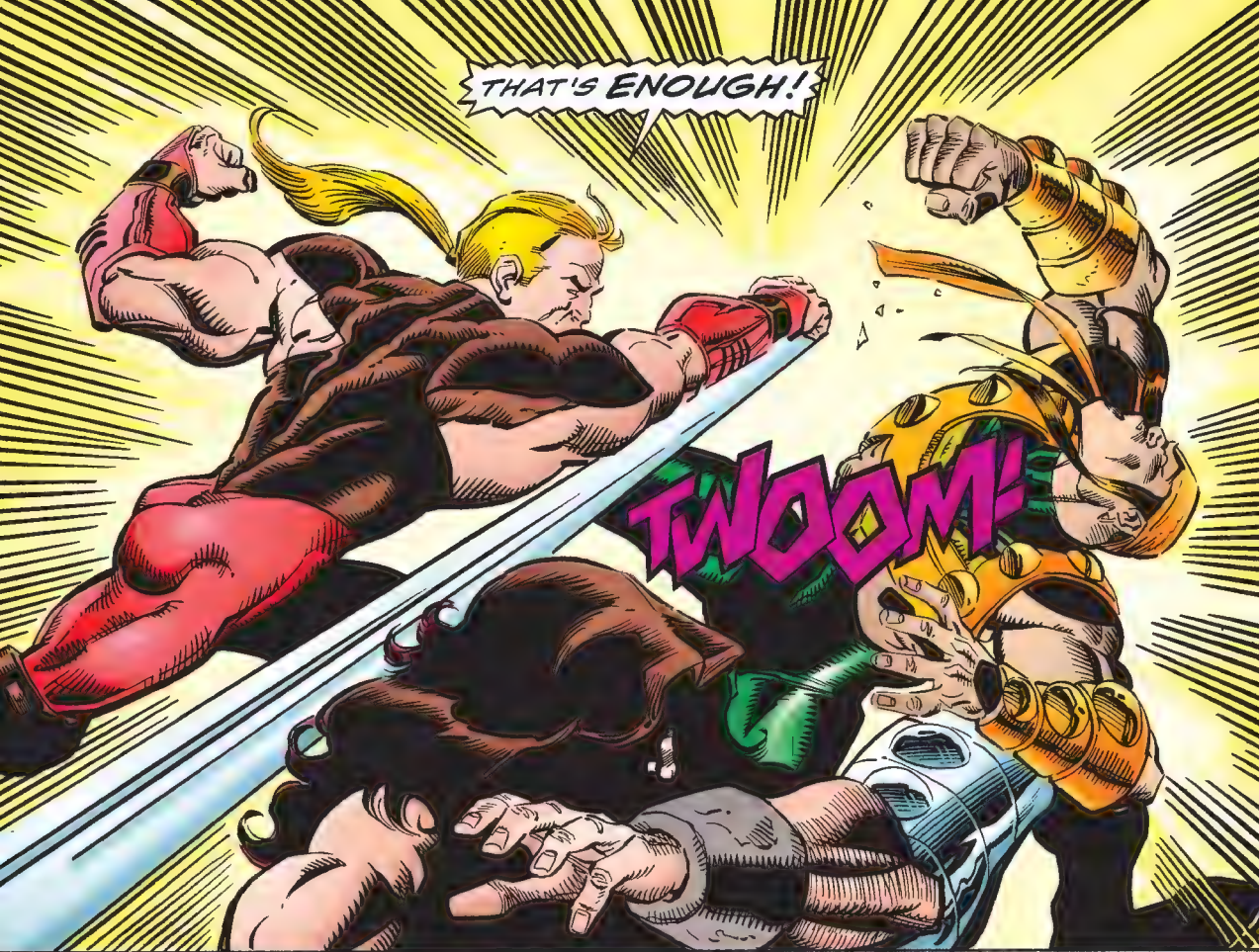
YOU SHOULD HAVE
LOVED MOM AS
MUCH AS SHE
LOVED YOU!

SHE DESERVED
BETTER!



SO DO I!





IF PURE FORCE IS ALL YOU UNDERSTAND, TRY ME!

LISTEN UP, MR. SELF-INVOLVED! WE ALL HAVE OUR PRIVATE PAINS, BUT THAT DOESN'T GRANT ANYONE A LICENSE TO BLINDLY INFLICT MORE MISERY!



YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY TRAINED FOR YEARS, HONING YOUR SKILLS IN THE HOPES OF EVENTUALLY FINDING YOUR DAD.

IS THIS HOW YOU WANT HIM TO REMEMBER YOU?!

STEP OUT OF YOUR PERSONAL HURT, AND LOOK AROUND, KID. YOUR FATHER ISN'T VACATIONING IN ARUBA.

HE'S NOT THROWING WILD BACCHANALS, OR STARTING NEW FAMILIES.



I'M NO HISTORY BUFF, BUT I DO RECALL THAT THE AVENGERS WERE IN A MAJOR BATTLE A YEAR OR SO BEFORE THEY OFFICIALLY DISBANDED.

A BATTLE THAT CLAIMED OVER HALF OF THEM--



--AND PROBABLY DROVE YOUR FATHER INTO LA-LA LAND!

THINK, ARGO! THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO LEARN WHAT REALLY WENT DOWN WITH HIM, AND WHY HE DISAPPEARED!



A-ALL RIGHT...

YOU SCORED THE POINT, THUNDERSTRIKE.



T-THUNDER-STRIKE--?!

ERIC--?!



ERIC! IS IT REALLY YOU? IF YOU STILL LIVE, THERE MAY YET BE HOPE!

H-HE THINKS I'M MY DAD!

I... I NEED YOU TO HELP ME, OLD FRIEND.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FINAL BATTLE!

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER AVENGERS?

THE AVENGERS! THEY STRODE ACROSS THE EARTH LIKE MODERN-DAY TITANS, PROUD AND BRAVE!

METING OUT JUSTICE!

DEFENDING THE INNOCENT!

AND BATTLING EVIL IN ALL ITS DARK AND MYRIAD FORMS!

YET THERE COMES A TIME WHEN EVEN THE GREATEST HEROES MUST MEET THEIR ULTIMATE CHALLENGE!

THOUGH THEY FACED AN UNBEATABLE FORCE AND INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS, THESE MOST VALIANT WARRIORS-BORN NEVER ONCE HESITATED TO STRIKE IN THE DEFENSE OF THEIR WORLD!

AND LO, THE BATTLE RAGED... AND RAGED... AND RAGED!



AND, YET, NO MAN-- WHETHER BORN OF WOMAN OR GODDESS-- CAN EVER HOPE TO TRULY WIN A BATTLE... WHEN HE FINDS THAT HE IS FIGHTING... HIMSELF!

B-BUT YOU ONCE FOUGHT SUCH A BATTLE, ERIC!

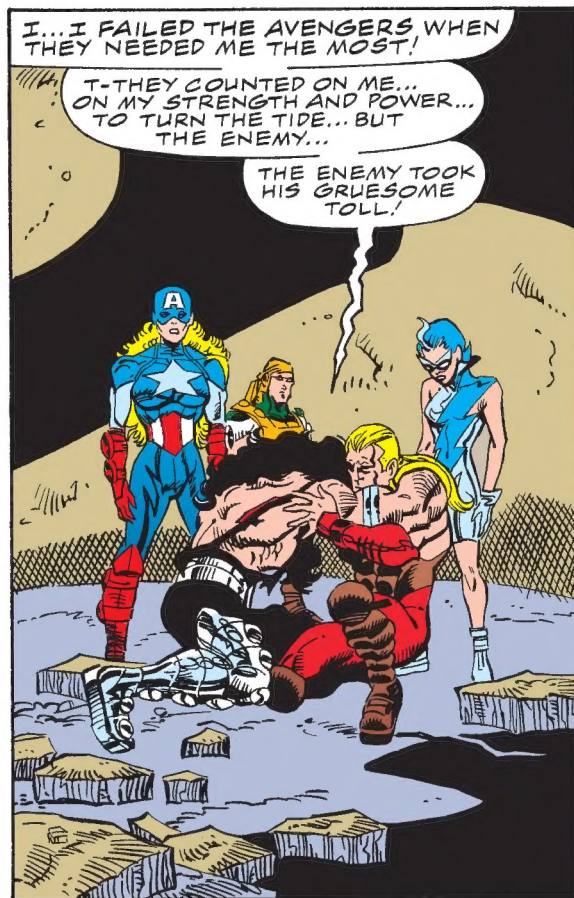
H-HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?



PERHAPS, THERE IS STILL A WAY TO AID THE OTHERS!

IF ONLY HERCULES CAN GIRD HIMSELF FOR ONE LAST ONSLAUGHT, WE CAN-- NO! I SEE IT REFLECTED IN YOUR EYES!

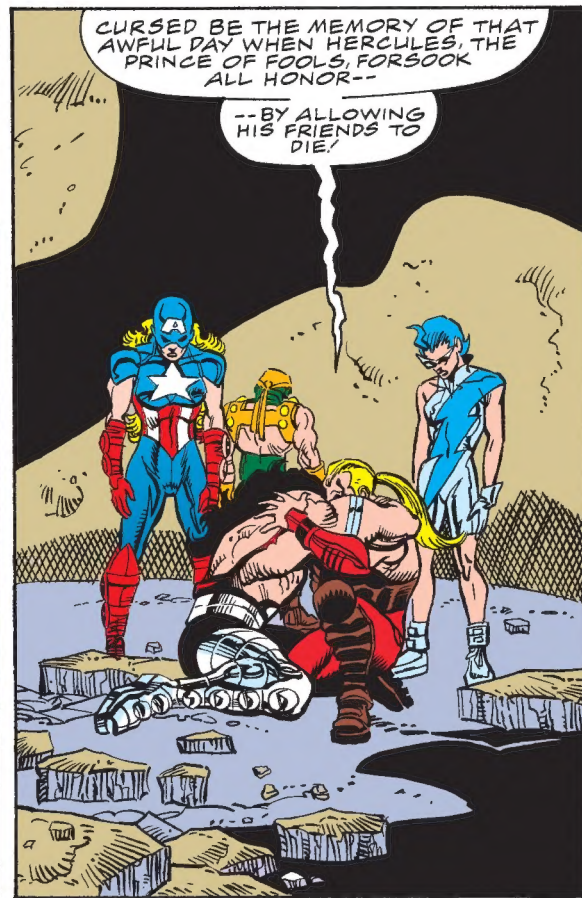
T-THERE IS NO HOPE!



I... I FAILED THE AVENGERS WHEN THEY NEEDED ME THE MOST!

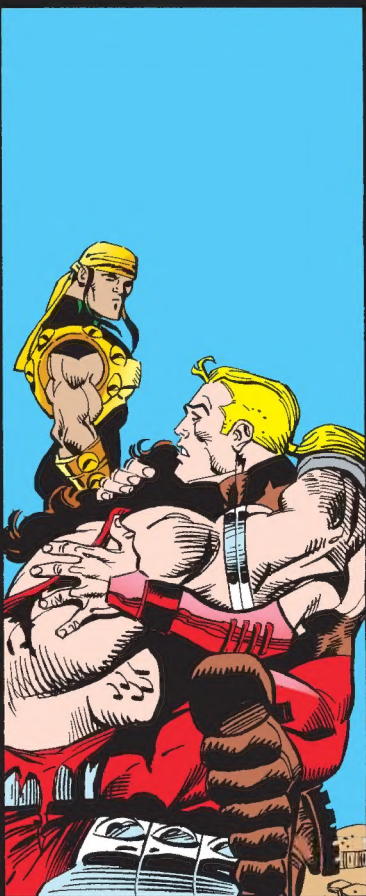
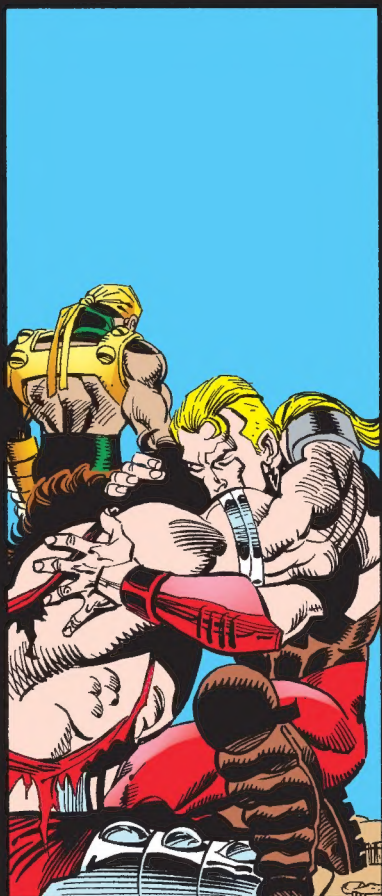
T-THEY COUNTED ON ME... ON MY STRENGTH AND POWER... TO TURN THE TIDE... BUT THE ENEMY...

THE ENEMY TOOK HIS GRUESOME TOLL!



CURSED BE THE MEMORY OF THAT AWFUL DAY WHEN HERCULES, THE PRINCE OF FOOLS, FORSOOK ALL HONOR--

--BY ALLOWING HIS FRIENDS TO DIE!





SO...WHAT
HAPPENS
NOW?!

WE ASK THE QUESTIONS
WE SHOULD HAVE ASKED
WHEN WE FIRST REFORMED
THIS TEAM.

WE FIND OUT WHAT
HAPPENED TO THE
ORIGINAL
AVENGERS!

WE GET
ANSWERS!

NEXT

ONE MYSTERY DEEPENS,
WHILE ANOTHER IS FINALLY
EXPOSED! WHILE SOME
MEMBERS OF THE TEAM
ARE TREATED TO A VERY
PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE
OF THE LAST DAYS OF
THE AVENGERS, STINGER
AND HER FAVORITE
ARMORED AVENGER
BATTLE FOR THEIR LIVES
AGAINST AN ALL NEW
SUPER-FOE, AND WE
FINALLY LEARN... THE
SECRET OF MAINFRAME!

SEE YOU IN
THIRTY!

Shadowcat

